

Assessing the State of Landscape Conservation Initiatives in North America

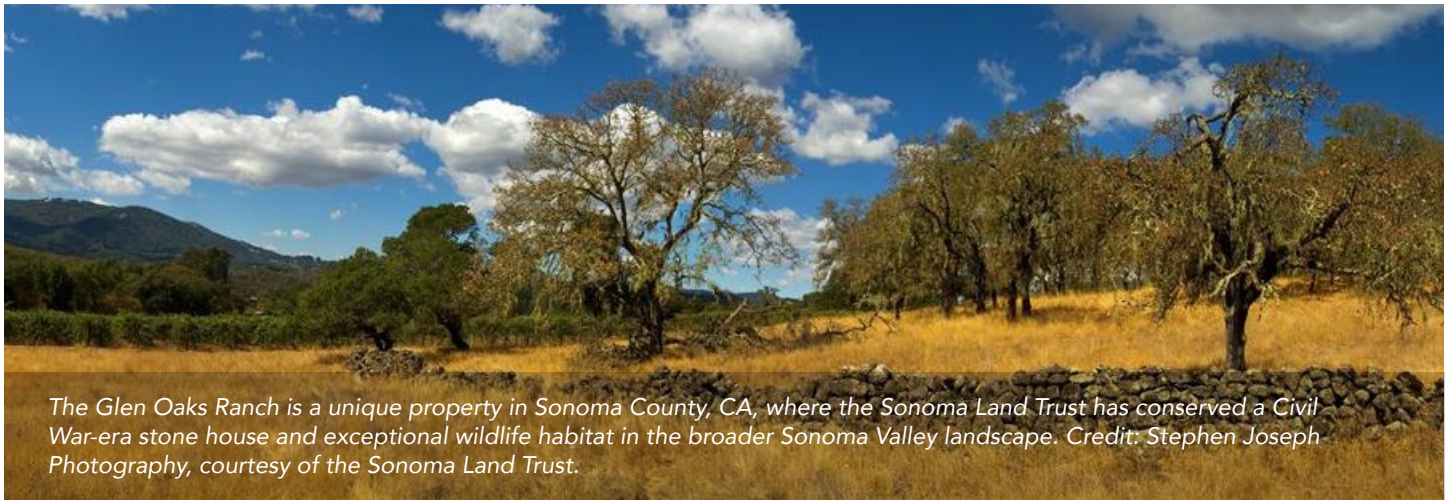
A Survey and Report



Network for Landscape

CONSERVATION

Advancing the Practice of Conservation at the Landscape Scale



ABOUT THE NETWORK FOR LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION

The Network for Landscape Conservation (NLC) connects people to ideas and innovations – and each other – to build a community of practice for the field of landscape conservation.

Launched by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy (Cambridge, MA) and partners in 2011, and now fiscally sponsored by the Center for Large Landscape Conservation (Bozeman, MT), the Network is led by a 30-person Coordinating Committee of conservation leaders in the non-profit, private, public, academic, and philanthropic sectors in the U.S. and Canada. The Network today includes more than 100 organizational partners and 2,000 individual practitioners.

Together, this growing community is developing effective tools and strategies and advancing best practices and policies to help people sustain the integrated landscape systems we cannot live without.

The Network for Landscape Conservation advances collaborative, cross border conservation as an essential approach to connect and protect nature, culture, and community.

Summary Report prepared by Jonathan Peterson and Emily Bateson based upon the results compiled and analyzed by Mickelson and Thomsen. Network for Landscape Conservation. 2018.

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www.landscapeconservation.org

Acknowledgments

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Cover image: The open grasslands ecosystem is a major component of the Mt. Tamalpais landscape in California. The Tamalpais Lands Collaborative is a public-private partnership working to ensure the long-term health of Mt. Tam. Credit: Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy.

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A setting sun over the North Sask headwaters outside Nordegg, Alberta. The Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative is partnering with the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and others on an initiative to protect headwaters throughout Alberta. Credit: Stephen Legault, courtesy of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative

INTRODUCTION

A major trend in conservation today in North America and beyond is the shift towards working collaboratively across larger landscapes to achieve results that are both locally and regionally significant. Indeed, a new era of “landscape conservation” has taken hold. But this approach is complex, and best practices, resources, science, and planning tools are still evolving; opportunities for progress and innovation will emerge as practitioners connect with one another to explore and understand this essential approach.

The Network for Landscape Conservation (NLC) has emerged as the central “hub” for making these connections and advancing the practice. A clear understanding of this growing field – where landscape conservation initiatives are emerging, who is involved in advancing these initiatives, and how these initiatives are working – promises fertile ground for making strategic connections, promoting peer-to-peer learning, and accelerating progress and innovation in the field.

Since its inception in 2011, NLC has worked to track the development of landscape conservation initiatives across the country and continent. Early efforts focused on tracking initiatives at a regional level: In 2012, the Regional Plan Association, a founding partner of NLC, published a report and atlas of landscape conservation initiatives in the Northeast. In 2013, NLC partnered with the Center for Natural Resources & Environmental Policy at the University of Montana to conduct a regional inventory and status report on landscape conservation initiatives of the Rocky Mountain West. NLC sought to fill gaps by collecting additional information in similar format through a “share your work” web-based questionnaire. However, inconsistencies in data across samplings have hindered efforts to bridge these datasets, and an analysis of national and continental trends within the field has yet to be completed.

2017 Survey

In November 2016, the Network for Landscape Conservation, in partnership with researchers at the University of Montana, launched a new in-depth survey of North American landscape conservation initiatives to develop a consistent baseline of data across regions. Working through its network of (at the time) 1,600 practitioners, NLC set out to gather updated and expanded information on the state of practice for the evolving field of landscape conservation. Specific goals of the survey were to:

1. Document the growth and locations of landscape conservation efforts;
2. Identify best practices and success stories to share with other practitioners;
3. Identify greatest challenges so the Network and others can develop programs, tools, and funding to surmount those challenges; and
4. Shine a spotlight on the rapid rise and critical importance of landscape conservation in order to help individual efforts and the community as a whole.

This survey was structured around 36 questions, including multiple selection, rank order, and open-ended questions. In addition to gathering basic background information (size, age, geographic location, point-of-contact, etc.) on self-identified landscape conservation initiatives, the survey also sought to probe initiative structure and governance, developmental stage, focus and/or emphasis, strategies and actions, performance and evaluation, and the extent of exchange/dialogue across initiatives. Data were collected from November 2016 through January 2017, and 152 participants -- representing 130 landscape conservation initiatives -- responded.

While individual responses to this survey are confidential, this report summarizes the collective body of data and important overall insights. Please note that this report, and the survey itself, are representative more than comprehensive: many existing and emerging initiatives undoubtedly have not been captured, and certain regions may be underrepresented. Nonetheless, the data represented here establish an updated and consistent North American baseline, and the Network intends to build on this foundation through additional surveying at three-year intervals. Such regular data collection will build a more comprehensive database of initiatives and allow NLC and the broader landscape conservation community to meaningfully track progress and trends within the field through time. A clearer understanding of the development of this field promises to enable practitioners, policymakers, funders, and other stakeholders to devise effective strategies, policies, and programs to advance landscape conservation and sustain our irreplaceable natural and cultural landscapes for current and future generations.

ABOUT LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION

Our natural landscapes are essential - for clean water, healthy ecosystems, vibrant communities and economies, climate resilience, cultural heritage, outdoor recreation, and local sense of place. Conserving intact landscapes means working together - at the larger scale that makes an enduring difference.

Landscape conservation is a framework for working together: the approach brings people together across geographies, sectors, and cultures to collaborate in conserving our important landscapes and the myriad ecological, cultural, and economic benefits they provide. This highly collaborative practice embraces the complexity of working at scale to connect and protect our irreplaceable landscapes - across public and private land, and from our cities to our wildest places.

This innovative and essential conservation paradigm represents a fundamental shift in traditional conservation thinking on three levels:

- **A shift in geographic scale:** Decades of scientific research have built an emerging systems-level understanding of the natural world and have underscored the importance of habitat connectivity across scales. To sustain biodiversity, ecological function, and climate resilience, conservation must transcend arbitrary boundaries and move beyond a site-specific, parcel-by-parcel approach.
- **A shift in perspective:** Wildlands, farmlands, timberlands, tribal lands, places of cultural and historical significance, rural communities, urban areas, and other private and public lands are all part of a fully integrated whole - a landscape - and do not exist independent of one another. The landscape conservation perspective is that the entire landscape, private to public, developed to wild, must be considered in a thoughtful and integrated manner.
- **A shift in process:** Landscape conservation crosses jurisdictional and topical boundaries, transcending traditional decision-making processes and top-down hierarchy. Instead, landscape conservation is generally characterized by a horizontal process and collaborative governance structure with long-term participation by a meaningful diversity of stakeholders.

In short, landscape conservation - also known as "large landscape conservation" and "landscape-scale conservation" - is about building a collective conversation and concomitant action on how we wish to shape our relationship with the land we live on and that is vital to sustain us and future generations.

SUMMARY OF KEY INSIGHTS

The collective body of data that emerged from the 2017 survey offers a clearer understanding of the state of landscape conservation practice in North America. Key insights from this data include:



LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION HAS EMERGED AS AN ESSENTIAL APPROACH TO ADDRESSING THE COMPLEX CONSERVATION CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY.

While examples of landscape conservation initiatives can be traced back to the early days of conservation at turn of the 20th Century, it is only in the last two decades that such initiatives have become widely prevalent. Nearly 90% of the initiatives surveyed have been founded since 1990, with 45% having been founded in the years since 2010 [see Summary Results for “Year Founded,” page 11]. Such data suggest that practitioners are increasingly turning to the landscape conservation approach to address the challenges they face in the landscapes where they live work, and play, and landscape conservation is taking hold as an essential approach to addressing the large-scale challenges of the 21st Century.



LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION IS NOT DEFINED BY SIZE.

Landscape conservation initiatives operate across a whole spectrum of different geographic sizes, from the scale of thousands of acres to many millions of acres [see Summary Results for “Geographic Size,” page 11]. Landscape conservation is not about absolute geographic size but rather about approach, with a holistic and collaborative focus on integrated cultural and ecological landscape systems. The extent of the collaboration also varies; many initiatives report a small circle of partners (53% of the initiatives have less than 30 partners) while others report expansive partnerships (19% have more than 100) [see Summary Results for “Number of Partners,” page 12].



LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION INITIATIVES ARE OFTEN CHARACTERIZED BY INFORMAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES.

While landscape conservation initiatives have emerged across a wide spectrum of governance structures, from informal to formal, the preponderance of initiatives report a more informal governance structure: nearly 75% of initiatives reported operating as either partnerships (58%) - entities converging around tangible, stated goals - or networks (15%) - entities converging around shared interests for informal collaboration. Only 15% of surveyed initiatives report having a formal institution governance structure [see Summary Results for “Governance Structure,” page 12]. This suggests that we are seeing a fundamental shift in how we approach conservation. The landscape conservation approach relies less on top down or otherwise mandated efforts, and is rather most often characterized by voluntary, horizontal collaborations that are inspired by a shared vision and propelled by the power of collective impact to sustain the landscapes that participants call home.



THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS IS CENTRAL TO THE SUCCESS OF LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION.

Factors related to collaboration and building effective relationships were regularly identified as central to the success of landscape conservation initiatives. For instance, the two most frequently cited drivers of success - appearing more often than even funding - were “support” (28% of responses were coded here, with “stakeholder trust and commitment” and “people power to move a collaborative forward relentlessly over time” as examples) and “partnerships” (17% of responses, with “long-term collaborations with MANY orgs” and “partners looking across boundaries” as examples) [see Summary Results for “Progress and Success,” page 19]. Some of the central elements of landscape conservation - working across jurisdictions and geopolitical boundaries, embracing voluntary and horizontal governances - require collaborative processes. These data underscore the point, suggesting that practitioners see collaboration as a fundamental component of the landscape conservation approach.



LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION INITIATIVES OFTEN EXHIBIT A “NESTED” ARRANGEMENT THAT ALLOWS IMPACT ACROSS SCALES.

“Nestedness” is highly prevalent in landscape conservation initiatives: 80% of landscape conservation initiatives report being either nested within a larger initiative or having smaller efforts nested within their initiative [see Summary Results for “Nestedness,” page 12]. This suggests that nested arrangements provide an effective mechanism for managing the tension of different geographic scales and jurisdictions, allowing people to work within their own manageable geographies or set of issues while also playing a role and working within the context of the larger region(s).



WHILE ECOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS CONTINUE TO DRIVE VIRTUALLY EVERY INITIATIVE, A DIVERSITY OF ADDITIONAL COMPLEMENTARY PRIORITIES IS ALSO EMERGING.

The data suggest that landscape conservation initiatives are primarily shaped by biodiversity and ecological themes. For instance, habitat fragmentation or loss (noted by 83% of respondents) and climate change (72%) were most frequently noted as threats within landscapes [see Summary Results for “Threats,” page 15]. Similarly, biodiversity conservation (90%) and watershed protection (77%) were most frequently noted as focus areas by initiatives [see Summary Results for “Focus Areas,” page 16]. However, a suite of additional inter-related priorities was also identified, including recreation, agricultural/grazing/timber lands and sustainable economies, ecosystem services, and cultural and historical significance - all of which were identified as focus areas by more than 20% of initiatives. This is consistent with the expanding understanding of landscape conservation as an approach that can be applied to advance a diversity of interrelated values, including ecological integrity, climate resilience, clean and abundant water, outdoor recreation cultural heritage, sustainable communities and natural resource-based economies, and connections to place.



THE LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION APPROACH CARRIES SPECIFIC, UNIQUE CHALLENGES.

Initiatives report confronting a wide range of challenges. Many of these challenges are unsurprising, as they are similar to those that conservationists have long faced: a lack of sufficient funding, changing demographics, accelerating development and land use conversion, and politics. Yet other challenges are different: building and maintaining effective collaboratives across a diversity of values and perspectives, establishing effective internal structure and operation on jurisdiction-spanning contexts, sharing and managing data at large scales and across jurisdictions, and working over long periods of time (beyond typical grant cycles or funder interest) [see Summary Results for “Challenges,” page 18]. What this suggests is that practitioners are having to face new challenges specific to the landscape conservation approach as they work to sustain healthy, interconnected landscapes.



THERE ARE COMMONALITIES AND LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM THE LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION APPROACH THAT CAN HELP ADVANCE THE FIELD.

The survey results underscore that landscape conservation initiatives come in different sizes, progress at different rates, and can include a different blend of priorities, approaches, and challenges. Each group of collaborative stakeholders must work within its own local and regional context to build trust and move toward shared vision, goals, and strategies. That being said, it is clear that practitioners do face many common challenges and deploy many common strategies that are specific to the landscape conservation approach. This suggests that significant opportunities exist for landscape conservation initiatives to draw on lessons learned in the field; there is no need to continually “reinvent the wheel” as our knowledge of collaborative landscape conservation practice continues to grow.



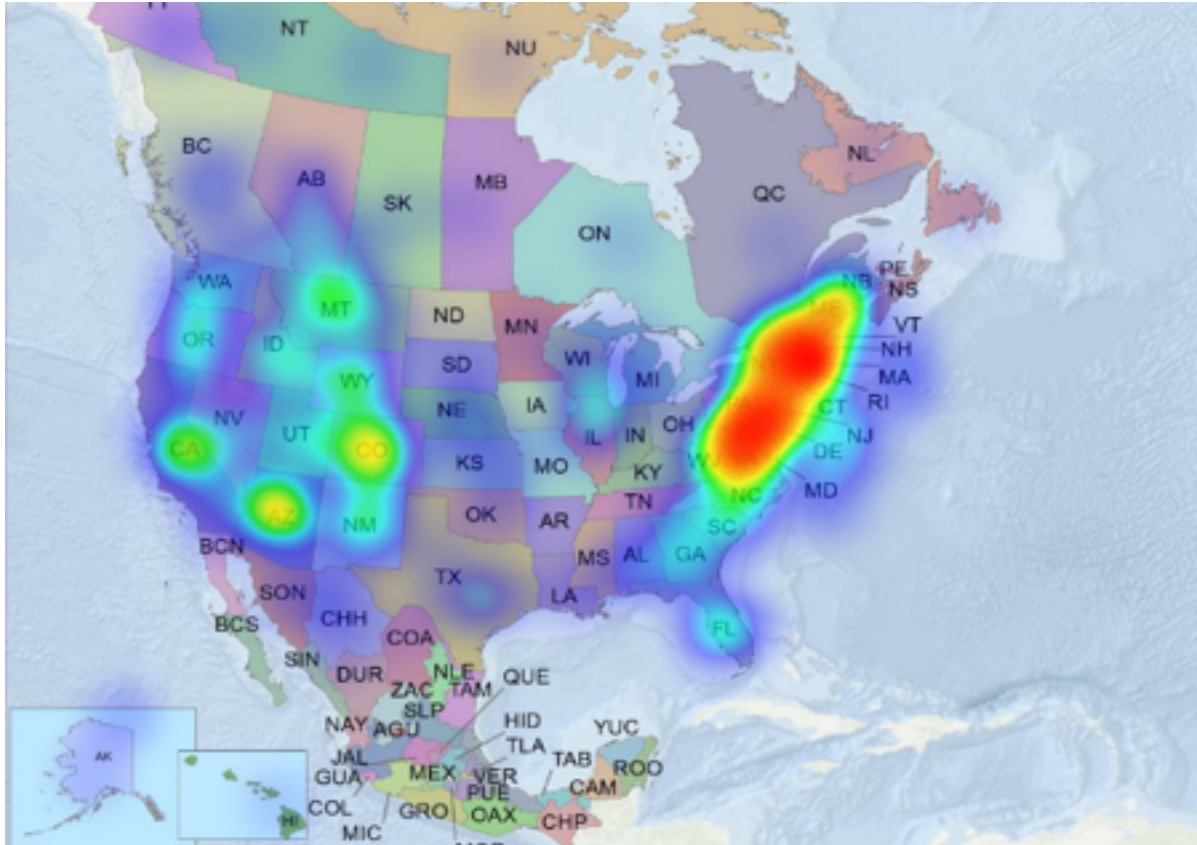
THE NETWORK FOR LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION HAS A VALUABLE ROLE TO PLAY IN CONNECTING THE BROADER LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION COMMUNITY.

Respondents report strong motivations for connecting and interacting with other landscape conservation initiatives [see Summary Results for “Motivations for Connecting,” page 21]. Despite this, only 27% of initiatives actually report doing so on a regular basis [see Summary Results for “Initiative-to-Initiative Interaction,” page 21]. Respondents identified several ways for the Network for Landscape Conservation to serve the broader landscape conservation community, with responses primarily framed around engagement with and learning from fellow practitioners and increasing knowledge and skills [see Summary Results for “Services of Value,” page 22]. Together, these data suggest that practitioners place high value on connecting with peers across initiatives (to gain insights and lessons learned, explore other examples, and broadly engage with one another around the landscape conservation approach), yet struggle to find pathways for doing so. In the growing field of landscape conservation, NLC has an important role as a platform for facilitating connections, exchange, and learning across initiatives.



The Desert Landscape Conservation Cooperative steering committee participates in a field tour to discuss wildfire regimes and water cycles in northern Arizona. The Desert LCC is one of the 22 Landscape Conservation Cooperatives that have been created throughout North America. Credit: Tahnee Robertson, courtesy of the Desert Landscape Conservation Cooperative.

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS



The above image is a Qualtrics map indicating the geographic distribution of respondents to the 2017 NLC survey. Participants were asked to identify any states and/or provinces that coincided with their landscapes. This “heat map” shows intensity of responses by region with increasing numbers as colors shift from blue to green to yellow to red. Note: although the survey primarily focused on North America (89 responses from the United States and its territories, 17 from Canada, and 3 from Mexico), several international colleagues participated, with initiatives in Australia, the Caribbean, and Chile providing data.

2017 LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION SURVEY: SUMMARY RESULTS

The 2017 survey consisted of 36 multiple selection, rank order, and open-ended questions. The summary below highlights key results from the survey, presented here in three general areas: data related to initiative background, including details on structure, developmental stage, staffing, and governance; data related to initiative implementation, including details on challenges, strategies, and performance evaluation; and data related to cross-initiative interaction and the role of the Network for Landscape Conservation.

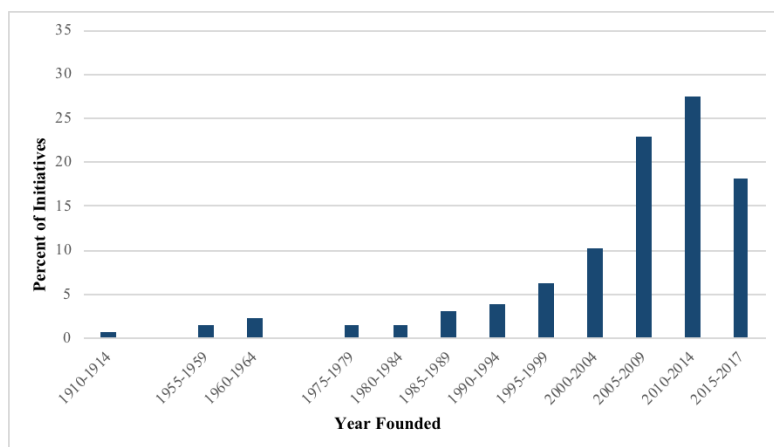
A. Initiative Background: Details on Structure, Stage, Staffing, and Governance

1. Year Founded, or Age of Initiative

Question: Year the landscape conservation initiative was founded?

Nearly 90% of initiatives surveyed were founded in the last 30 years: 45% of initiatives were founded in just the seven years since 2010 and 44% of the initiatives surveyed were founded between 1990 to 2010. Only 11% of initiatives surveyed were founded before 1990.

Figure 1: Year of founding for initiatives that responded to the 2017 survey.

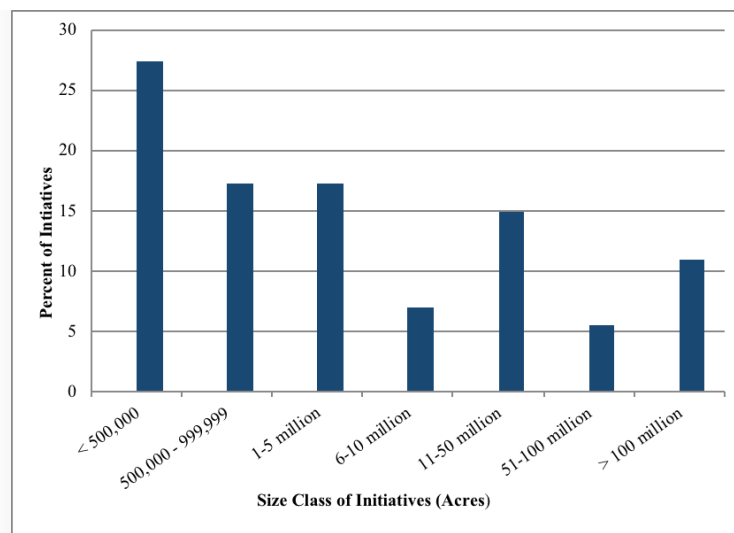


2. Geographic Size

Question: Size (in acres) of landscape conservation initiative?

Surveyed initiatives represented a wide range of geographic scales, from small (27% of surveyed initiatives were less than 500,000 acres in size) to very large (11% of initiatives were over 100 million acres).

Figure 2: The size class (in acres) of initiatives that responding to the 2017 survey.



3. Number of Partners

Question: Approximate number of partners involved in your landscape conservation initiative?

The size of partnership varies for landscape conservation initiatives. 53% of surveyed initiatives had less than 30 partners. 19% of initiatives though reported more than 100 partners.¹

¹ For more information on the composition of partners, reference question 8 in [Appendix of the Full Survey Analysis](#).

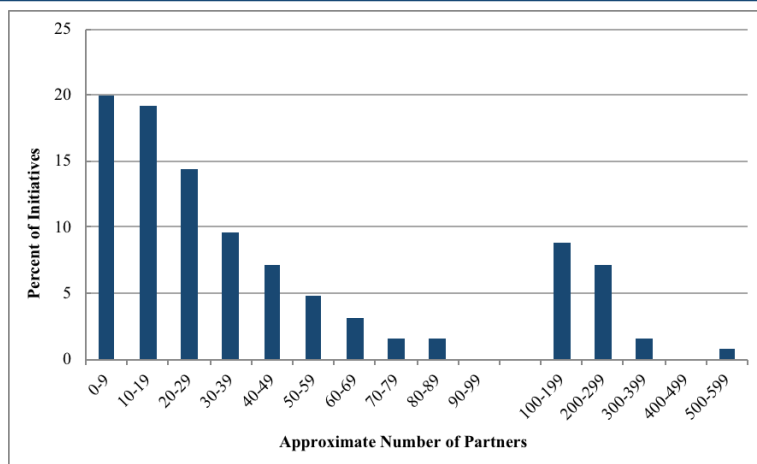


Figure 3: The approximate number of partners involved in initiatives that responded to the 2017 survey.

4. Nestedness

Question: Please indicate (can select more than one answer) whether your initiative: is nested within a larger initiative, has smaller initiatives nested within it, or is not nested in any way.

39% of respondents indicated their initiative was nested within a larger initiative or effort, and 55% reported their initiative contains smaller initiatives nested within their effort. 14% of initiatives reported being both nested within a larger initiative and having smaller initiatives nested within itself. Only 20% of initiatives reported not being nested in any way.

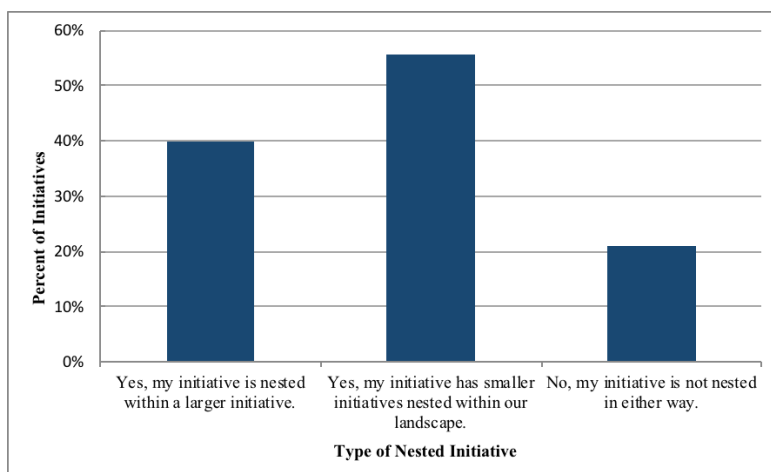


Figure 4: The extent to which initiatives that responded to the 2017 survey report being nested.

5. Governance Structure

Question: Indicate which governance structure best describes your landscape conservation initiative.

Almost three-quarters of initiatives reported non-formal collaborative governance structures:

- 58% of respondents indicated a partnership structure: “non-governmental organizations, or government agencies and other partners that are working together toward tangible, stated conservation goals.”
- 15% of respondents indicated a Network structure: “a more informal collaboration of entities with a shared interest in a common landscape and a focus on information-sharing.”

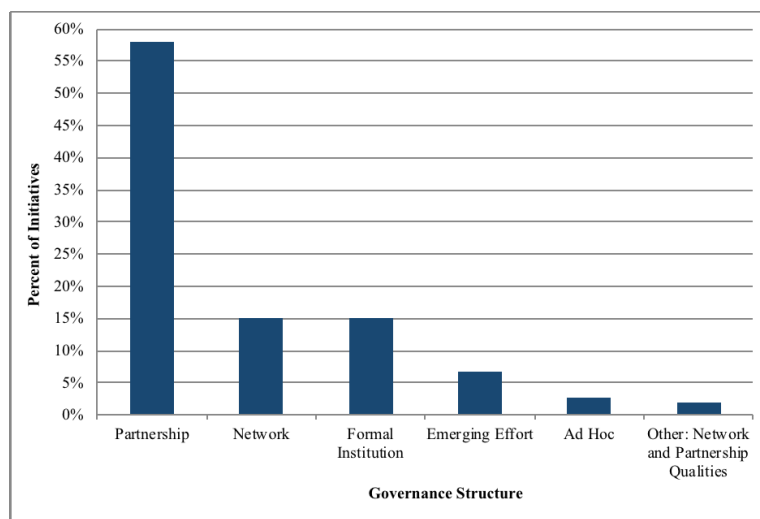


Figure 5: Respondents to the 2017 survey classified their governance structure into six generalized types.

The Formal Institution (15%): anything that exists in federal, state, or local law with a specific landscape mandate (e.g. commission, council, agency, legal compact, etc.). Emerging Effort (6%): too new to determine what form the initiative will take. Ad Hoc structure (2%): a group of people and organizations who are focused on short-term project or activity at the landscape scale.

6. Convener

Question: *Indicate the main convener/coordinator for the landscape conservation initiative.*

More than a third of initiatives report being convened by a conservation organization (26%) or land trust (12%). Federal agencies were reported as the principle convener of 23% of initiatives.

“Other” (22%) consisted of: combination of conveners, non-profits, cultural resource organizations, county coordinator, cooperatives, alliances, steering committee, businesses, volunteer leadership team, and individuals.

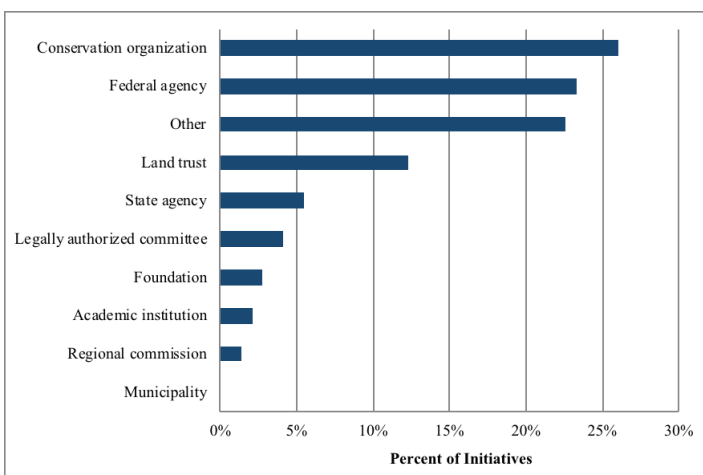


Figure 6: How respondents to the 2017 survey classified the main convener of their initiative.

7. Status of Initiative Development

A series of questions explored the developmental status of landscape conservation initiatives:

Question: *Indicate the status of your landscape conservation initiative on the following items.*

Initiatives report significant progress on several proxies of initiative development, with nearly 90% of initiatives in the process of completing or having already completed hiring staff, creating a strategic action plan, and establishing a governance structure. On staffing, 55% of the participants responded their initiative has a full-time paid director or coordinator; only 7% of the respondents indicated their initiative depends upon a volunteer director or coordinator.

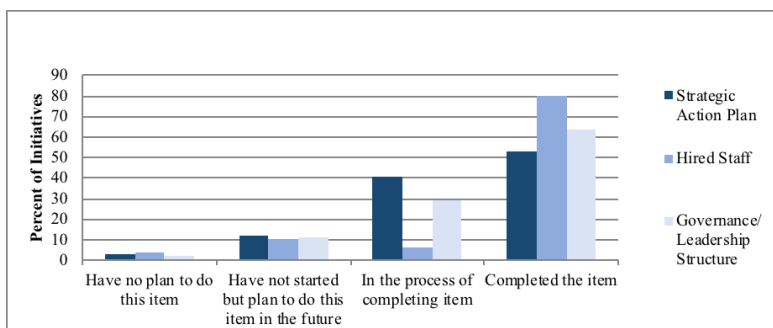


Figure 7a: Reported initiative progress on proxies of initiative development.

Question: *Indicate the category that best describes the current stage of your landscape conservation initiative.*

Participants were also asked to rank their initiative in one of six categories of developmental stages:

- 4% in Anticipate Stage: The vision stage when enthusiastic people get together to see if it is possible to work toward and achieve a common goal across the broader landscape.
- 11% in Articulate Stage: the stage when the foundational documents and procedures are developed and agreed upon including mission and goals, objectives, and basic governance. Stakeholders build vital trust as they work together to lay this preliminary groundwork.

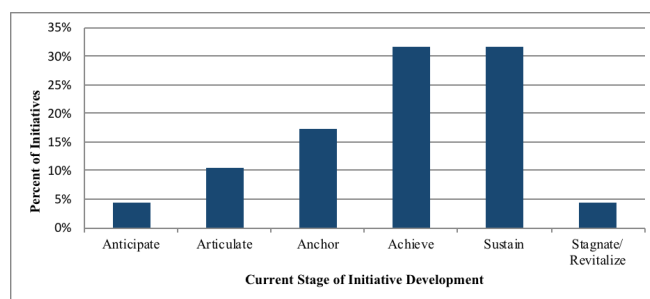


Figure 7b: Reported stage of initiative development.

- 17% in Anchor Stage: The stage when the core programmatic and structural pieces are put into place that will be important to achieve the stated goals, often including a strategic action plan, maturing governance and processes, and growing capacity, including staffing and fundraising.
- 32% in Achieve Stage: The stage when the initiative moves forward with the action plan and achieve other stated objectives. This stage may be lengthy, and should include ongoing and final evaluation of process and outcomes.
- 2% Sustain Stage: This stage occurs when the initiative embraces a real need to operate in a longer time frame to achieve shared conservation goals and has the organizational maturity to launch those activities. The group may need to reinvent itself in some ways as it grows in this direction. A sustaining initiative may branch into new projects and other new services for its partners.
- 4% Stagnate/ Revitalize Stage: This stage occurs when and if the initiative is facing significant challenges that reduce capacity to achieve or progress towards goals and can lead to membership turnover, loss of funding support, changes in leadership, etc. Initiatives are at a point where they can disband or revitalize and revisit their long-term vision and mission.

8. Frequency of Meetings

Question: Indicate how often your landscape conservation initiative meets by phone or in-person.

Nearly every initiative reports an in-person, all-member gathering at least once a year: two-thirds (67%) of initiatives report such a gathering only once a year, while 27% of initiatives report doing this quarterly and 5% of initiatives have all-member meetings monthly. Phone meetings appear to be heavily relied upon to facilitate regular interaction: 60% of initiatives report having monthly phone meetings with core partners and 50% report having monthly phone meetings of a steering committee.

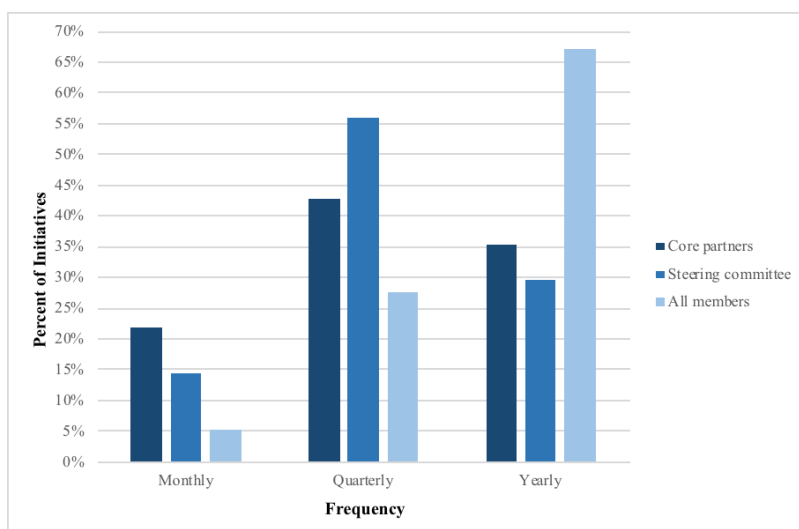


Figure 8a: Reported frequency of in-person meetings

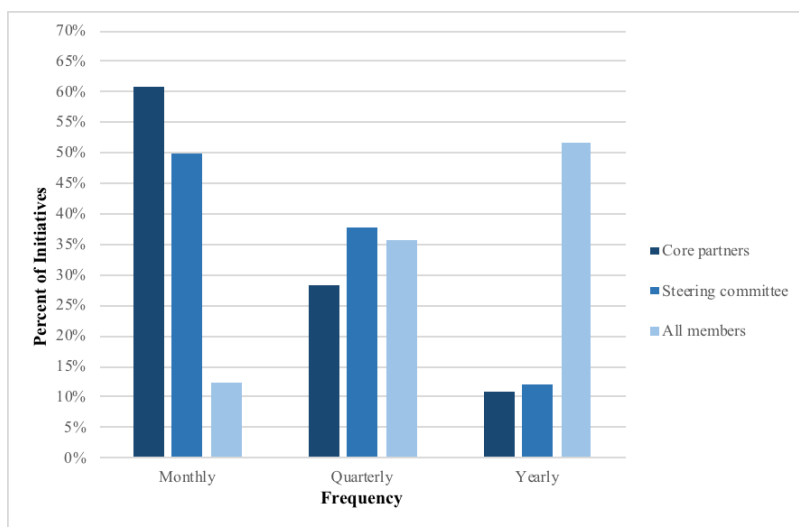


Figure 8b: Reported frequency of phone meetings

B. Initiative Implementation: Details on Challenges, Strategies, and Performance

9. Threats

Question: Identify the five top threats facing your landscape conservation initiative, prioritizing 1 to 5 with 1 being the highest priority, to the extent possible. (Note: 12 potential threats listed)

The most frequently identified threats listed by responding initiatives were: (1) habitat fragmentation or loss (included in the top five by 83% of respondents); (2) climate change (72%); (3) urban encroachment (62%); (4) quantity or quality of water resources (59%); and (5) lack of awareness of landscape-scale systems and impacts (49%).

The data can also be parsed by the weight each respondent gave to their top five threats. "Habitat fragmentation or loss" was listed as the biggest threat by 27% of respondents. "Urban encroachment" was identified as the biggest threat by 17% of respondents, followed by "water resources" (15%) and "climate change" (14%).

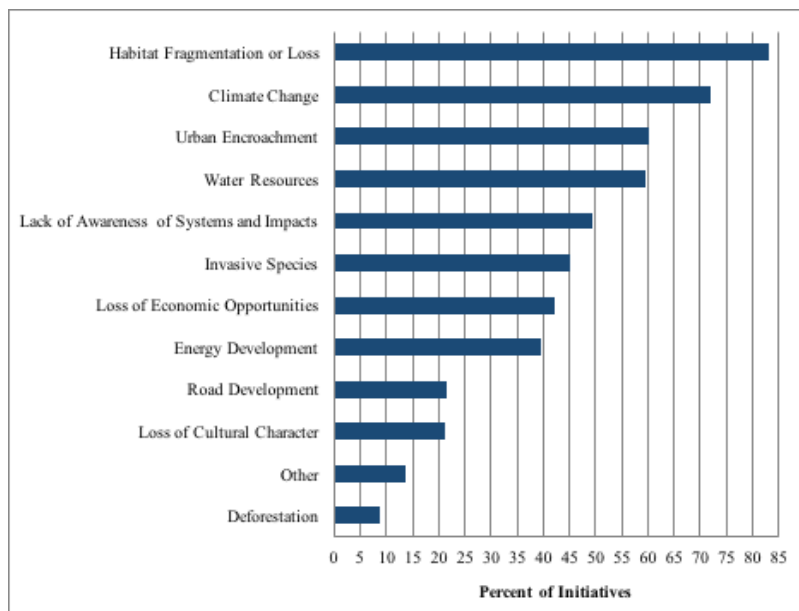


Figure 9a: Distribution of the frequency of threats identified by initiatives that responded to the 2017 survey.

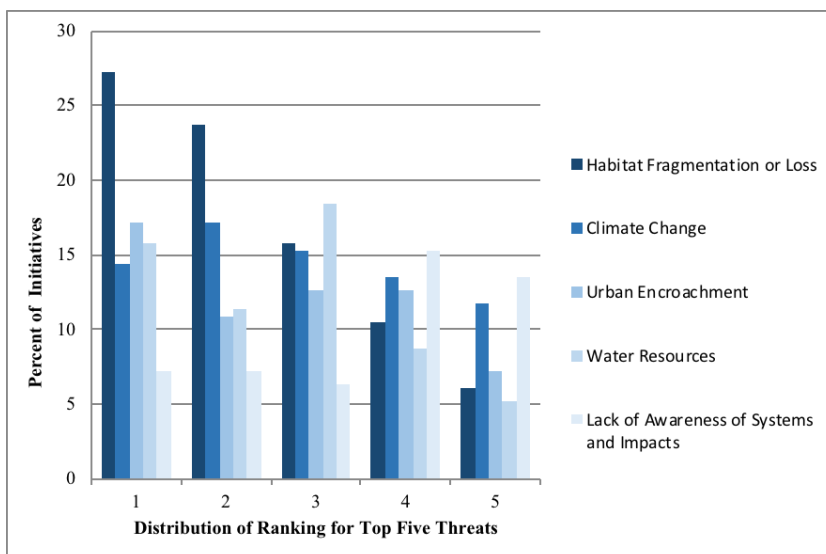


Figure 9b: Distribution of each of the five most frequently identified threats by priority given by individual respondents.

10. Focus Areas

Question: Identify the five major focus areas of your landscape conservation initiative, prioritizing 1 to 5 with 1 being the highest priority, to the extent possible. (Note: 13 potential focus areas listed)

The most frequently identified focus areas listed by responding initiatives were: 1) biodiversity conservation (included by 90% of respondents); watershed protection (70%); 3) connectivity and wildlife corridors (56%); 4) open space for recreation and leisure (44%); and 5) sustaining agriculture, grazing, or timber lands (38%). Climate change mitigation and response was sixth, at 37%.

The data again can be parsed by the weight each respondent gave to each of the top five focus areas. "Habitat, wildlife, and biodiversity conservation" was identified as the primary focus area by 41% of respondents. Additionally, "watershed protection for water quality and supply" was listed as the primary focus by 13% of respondents and "open space for recreation and leisure" was listed as the primary focus by 11% of respondents.

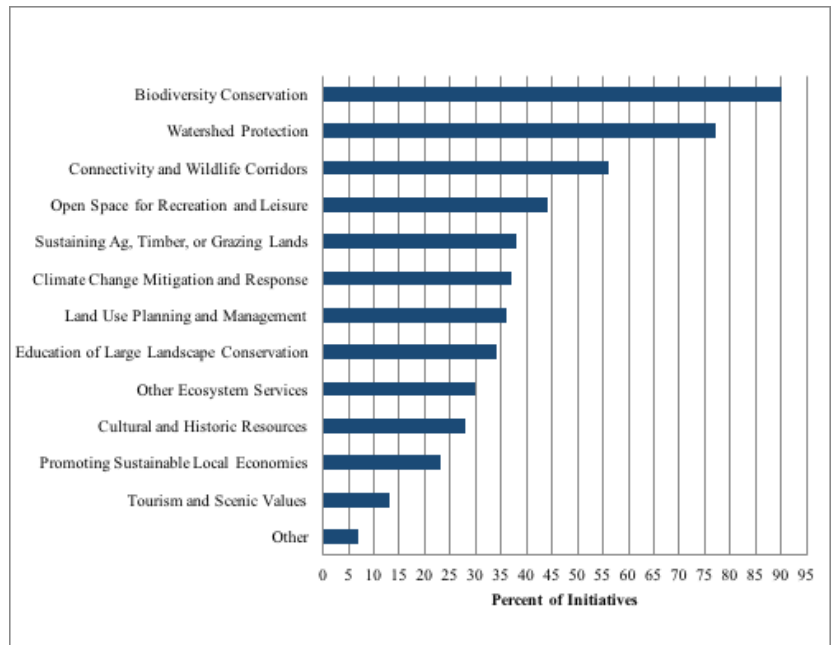


Figure 10a: Distribution of the frequency of focus areas identified by initiatives that responded to the 2017 survey.

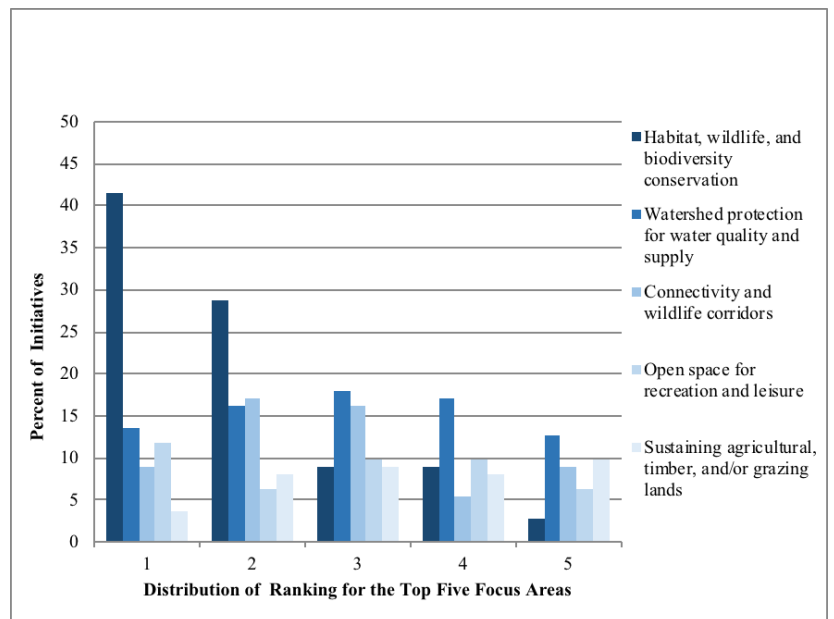


Figure 10b: Distribution of each of the five most frequently identified focus areas by priority given by individual respondents.

11. Tools and Strategies

Question: Identify five key strategies and tools provided by your landscape conservation initiative, prioritizing 1 to 5 with 1 being the highest priority, to the extent possible. (Note: 13 potential tools and strategies listed)

The most frequently identified tools and strategies reported by responding initiatives were: 1) facilitating strategic conservation planning (identified by 82% of respondents), 2) information-sharing (54%), 3) coordinating activities of partner groups (53%), 4) land protection through acquisition and easements (52%), and 5) crafting a vision that attracts interest and funding (41%).

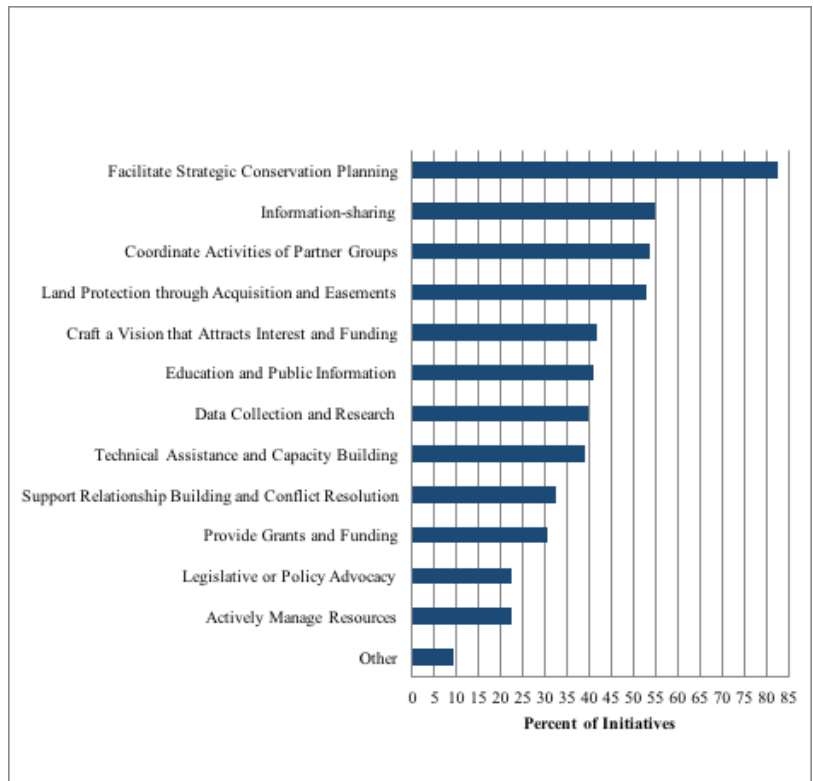


Figure 11a: Distribution of the frequency of tools and strategies identified by initiatives that responded to the 2017 survey.

The data can also be parsed by the weight each respondent gave to their top five tools and strategies. "Facilitating strategic conservation planning" was listed as the most important tool or strategy by 42% of the respondents. "Creating a vision that attracts interest and funding" was ranked as the most important tool or strategy by 13% of respondents, and 12% of respondents identified "land protection through acquisition and easements" as the most important tool or strategy.

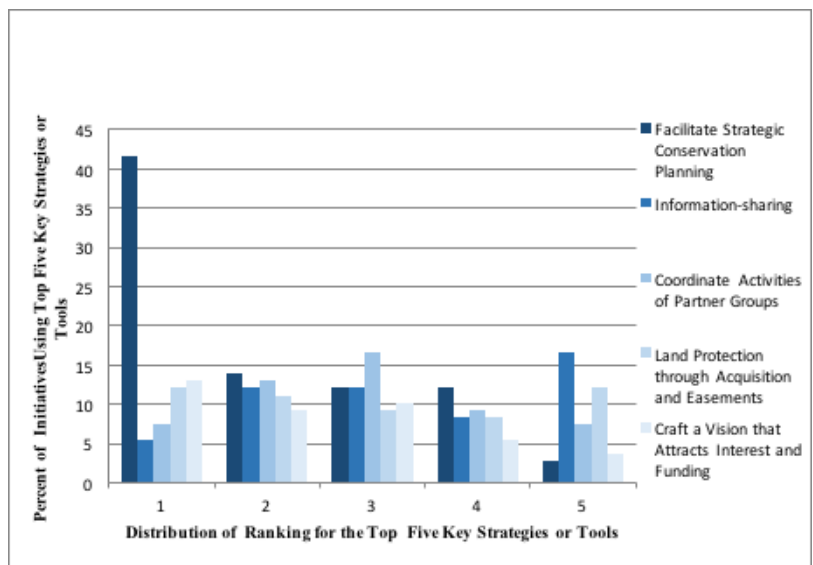


Figure 11b: Distribution of each of the five most frequently identified tools and strategies by priority given by individual respondents.

12. Challenges

A series of questions explored how initiatives understand and think about challenges.

Question: What do you perceive as the three greatest challenges to achieving your initiative's goals?

Responses to this open-ended question were coded into general categories. The most frequently identified perceived challenges were funding (27%), external social factors (23%), initiative internal structure (13%) and initiative effectiveness (13%).

Examples of responses coded to Funding: reduction in available state and federal funding; higher donor value placed on on-the-ground project work than collaboration and networking for long-term collective impact; donor fatigue; and a general dearth of funding available for this collaborative work – particularly in the necessary longer-term time frame.

Examples of External Social Factors responses: the rapid pace of development and habitat fragmentation; increasing resource demands; the lack of political support for conservation; lack of understanding of landscape value for full range of ecosystem services; urban/rural divides; and anti-government attitudes.

Example of Internal Structure responses: building and retaining staffing capacity; juggling multiple objectives; and combating meeting fatigue.

Examples of Initiative Effectiveness responses: fragmentation of projects; competing/conflicting interests and priorities; implementation issues in large-scale program area; and achieving short-term and meaningful projects.

Question: What do you think are the root causes of these challenges?

Responses to this open-ended question were again coded into general categories. The most frequently addressed issues related to insufficient funding (identified by 34% of respondents), external factors (24%), and support and awareness of the initiative's goals (18%).

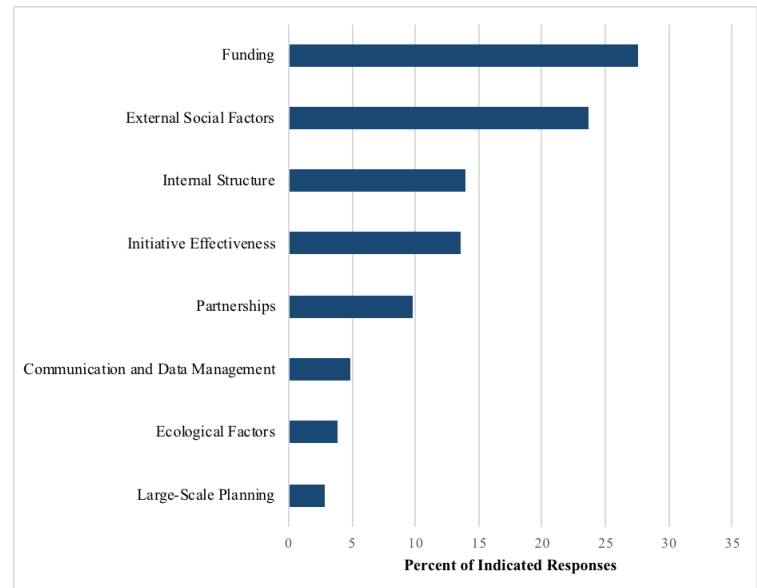


Figure 12a: Distribution of the frequency of identified challenges to achieving initiative goals.

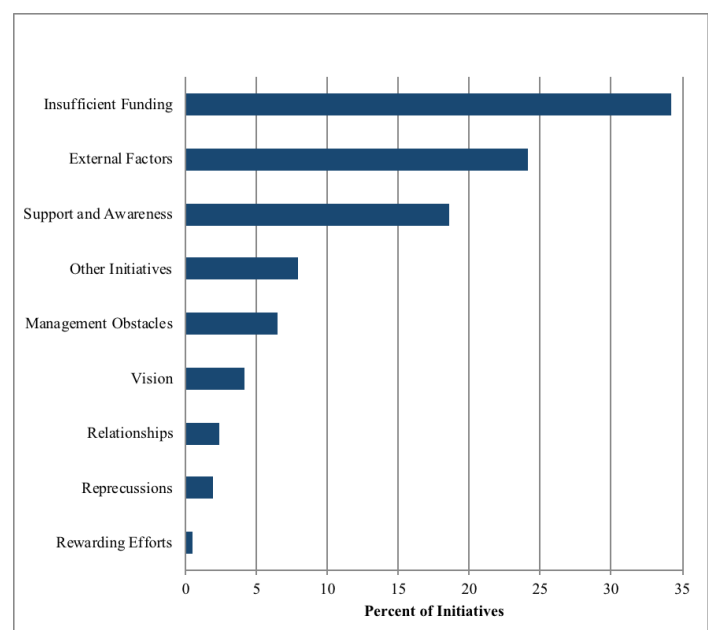


Figure 12b: Distribution of the frequency of root causes for perceived challenges as reported by respondents.

13. Progress & Success

A series of questions explored how initiatives think about and evaluate progress and success:

Question: *list three accomplishments or biggest successes of your landscape conservation initiative.*

Responses to this open-ended question were coded into general categories. The most frequently cited responses here included the implementation of projects and programs (noted by 28% of respondents), management structure and strategies (18%), and communication (14%).

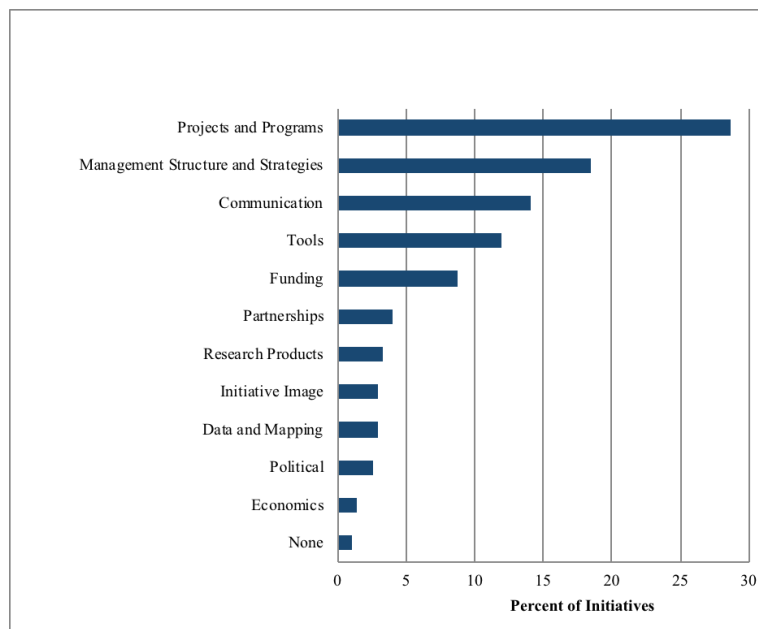


Figure 13a: Distribution of the frequency with which categories of accomplishments were identified by respondents.

Question: *What are the three most important factors contributing to your initiative's overall progress and success?*

Open-ended responses to this question were again coded into general categories. Important factors identified as contributing to a landscape conservation initiative's overall progress or success were support (28%), partnerships (17%), funding (16%), and leadership (15%).

Examples of Support responses included "stakeholder trust and commitment" and "people power to move a collaborative forward relentlessly over time."

Examples of Partnerships responses included "long-term collaborations with MANY organizations" and "partners looking across boundaries."

Examples of Funding responses included "securing competitive funding" and "providing direct value to partners through grants."

Examples of Leadership included "internal champions" and "participation of steering committee members."

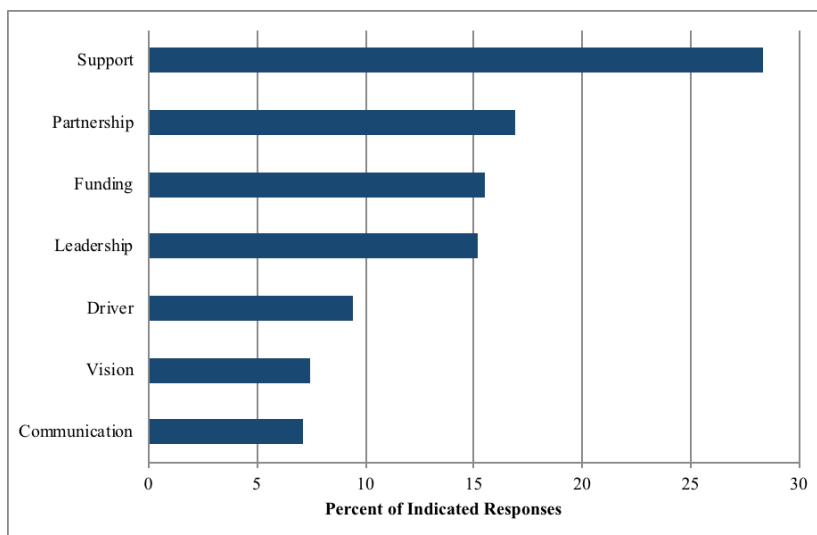
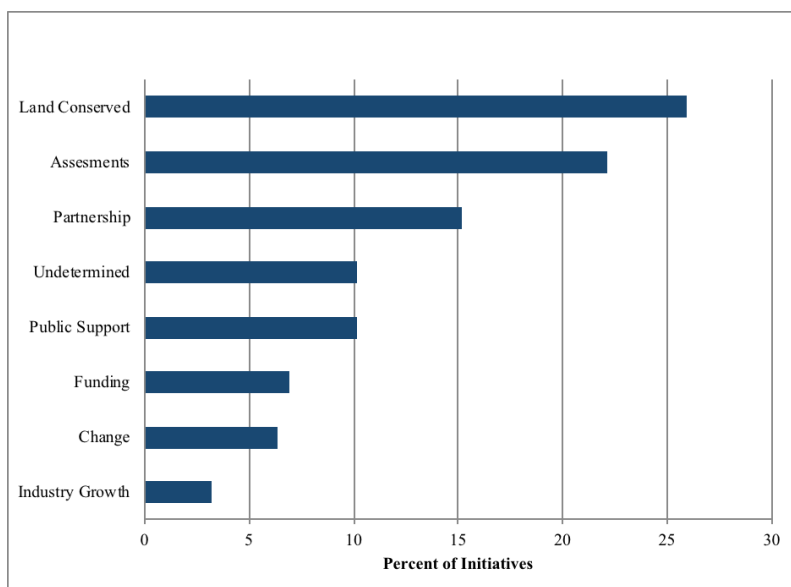


Figure 13b: Distribution of the frequency of factors identified as contributing to initiative progress and success.

Question: How does your landscape conservation initiative measure success and outcomes?

Responses to this open-ended question were again coded into general categories; the most frequently cited factors used as metrics for success included: land conserved (noted by 25% of respondents), assessments (22%), and partnership (15%).

Figure 13c: Distribution of the frequency of evaluation metrics reported.



C. The Community of Practice: Peer Connections and Exchange

14. Initiative-to-Initiative Interaction

Question: How frequently does your landscape conservation initiative engage with other landscape conservation initiatives?

Respondents were asked to identify how frequently they engaged with other landscape conservation initiatives. 27% of respondents indicated that they engaged with other initiatives frequently, 64% report only occasionally interacting with other initiatives, and 7% report never doing so.

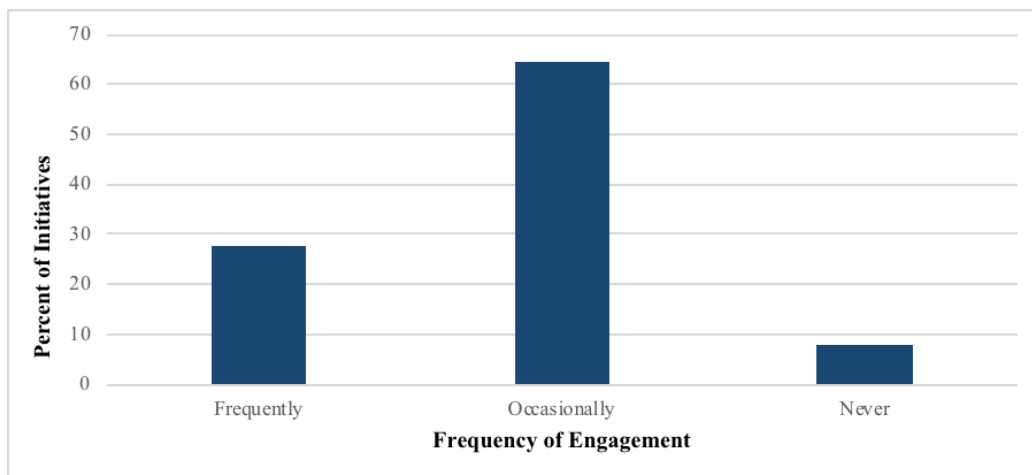


Figure 14: Reported frequency at which initiatives engage with other initiatives.

15. Motivations for Connecting

Question: What motivates your initiative to engage with other landscape conservation initiatives?

Respondents reported strong motivations for engaging with other landscape conservation initiatives, with an average of more than three responses per initiative (respondents were asked to select as many motivations as applied). The most frequently cited motivation, "similar issues and goals," was noted by 82% of respondents. "Sharing a geographic region or having overlapping resource interests" (70%) and looking for mentoring and/or lessons learned (58%) were the next most frequently cited motivations.

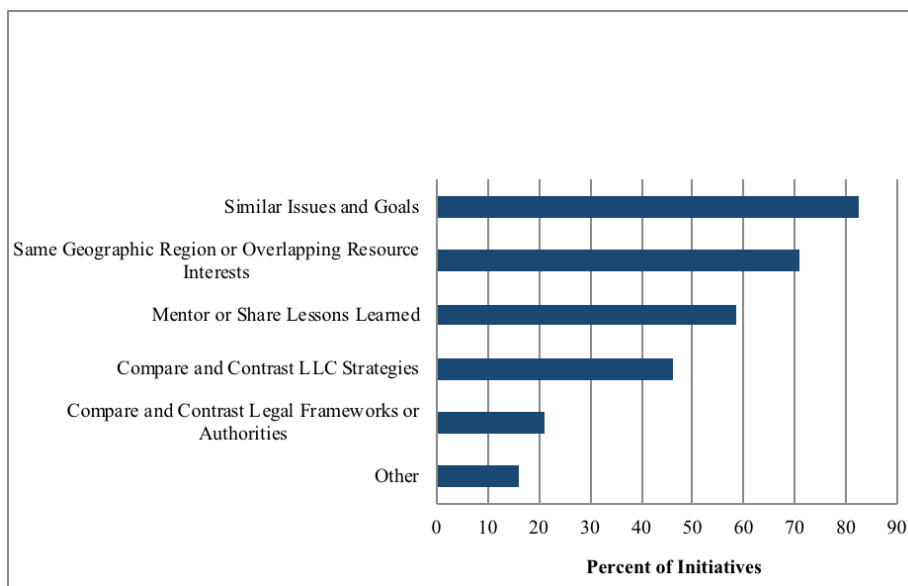


Figure 15: Distribution of frequency of reported motivations for engaging with other landscape conservation initiatives.

16. Services of Value

Question: How can the Network for Landscape Conservation best support your initiative? (7 services identified, and respondents asked to rank in order of value)

Based on the responses (see Figure 16a), the five most important services that the Network can provide to landscape conservation practitioners are:

- Learning about others' work through the NLC website, e-news, and other materials (included in the top three most valuable services by 71% of respondents);
- Increasing landscape conservation knowledge and skills through NLC tools and resources (66%);
- Connecting with peers at NLC workshops, meetings, conferences (54%);
- Generating support for influencing policy (40%); and
- Connecting with peers through a targeted NLC exchange program (29%).

Again, the data can be parsed by the weight each respondent gave to the most valuable services (see Figure 16b). "Learn about others' work" was listed as the most important tool or strategy by 26% of the respondents, while 22% of respondents identified "generate support for influencing policy" as the most important service.

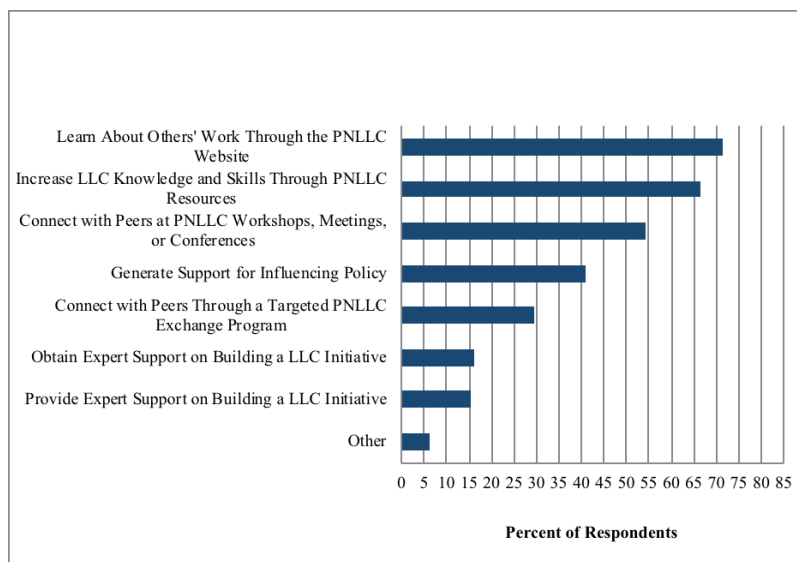


Figure 16a: Distribution of the frequency each service was identified as a top-three value by survey respondents.

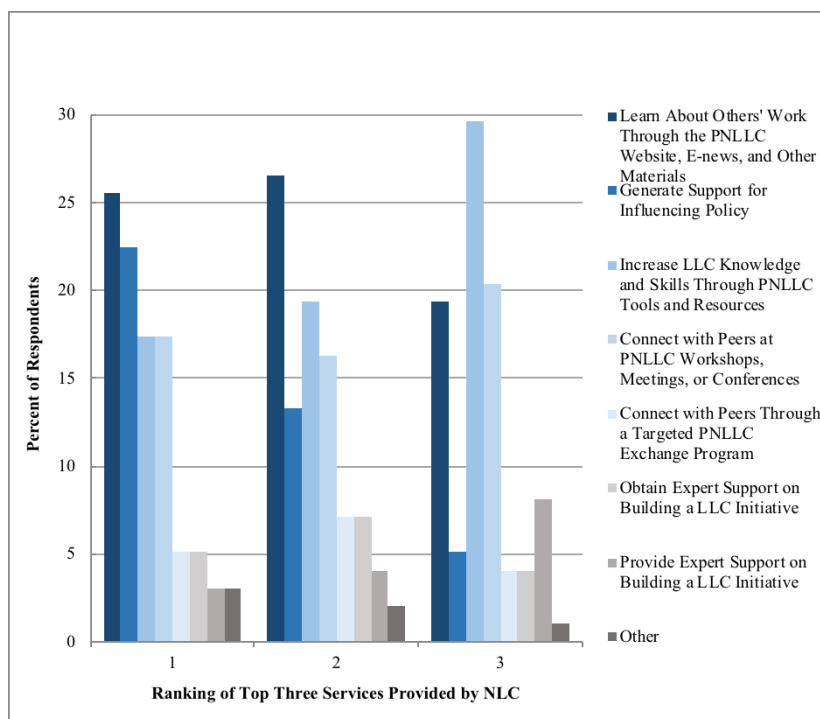


Figure 16b: Relative frequency of each service being ranked as the most valuable, second most valuable, or third most valuable service provided by NLC.

Note: PNLLC, as seen in legends of both figures, is a reference to the Practitioners Network for Large Landscape Conservation. In 2017 the Practitioners Network shortened its name to the Network for Landscape Conservation.

SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS

Measuring the success of collaborative networks or initiatives is complicated, and conventional measurements of “bucks and acres” conservation do not always translate seamlessly to capturing the impact of collaborative landscape conservation. New methods for measuring the success of networks are being explored, including the use of social network analysis, an analytic tool for assessing the social structure and connectedness between entities. NLC, as a network of landscape conservation initiatives, drew upon the 2017 survey data to employ social network analysis to explore how connected individual initiatives are and how connected we all are as a community.

This initial analysis was comprised of 270 entities or initiatives (73 initiatives that provided answers to social network questions in the survey and an additional 197 entities or initiatives identified by the survey respondents as collaborators). This analysis does not attempt to account for the 100 organizational partners and the 2,000 engaged practitioners in the Network and the additional ways these partners and practitioners connect. However, this social network analysis represents an important early step in developing a better sense of how the NLC network “maps,” and offers insight into the connections between landscape conservation initiatives.

The social network map is represented below. For individual initiatives, connections are visually represented by lines or “ties.” Exploring the “substance” of these ties can suggest why the connections exist. In this preliminary NLC social network analysis, 30% of these ties were formed through connections about project implementation, 23% from sharing best practices, 20% from reporting updates, 11% from funding, 7% from governance, and 6% on indicators. At the community level, the map illustrates that many of the initiatives are connected in a main “cluster.” However, additional clusters exist around the periphery where initiatives are connected to one another but not to the core of the network.

This is the start of some very promising analysis, and represents an innovative method for quantifying the value and impact of collaboration over time. With additional data collection planned in the future, NLC looks forward to tracking how this network - and the field - grows, evolves, and matures into the future.



CONCLUSION

The hope is that this summary report – and the survey behind it – begins to bring into focus the “landscape” of landscape conservation that currently exists in North America, clarifying where landscape conservation initiatives are underway, who is involved, and how the initiatives are operating.

This information should prove helpful to individual practitioners who are too often “reinventing the wheel” in their own landscapes. This important snapshot of the state of practice can also be used to promote, support, and advance landscape conservation as an essential practice to peers, policymakers, and funders throughout North America and beyond.

As the practice of landscape conservation continues to grow, the Network looks forward to opportunities to collaborate with you and your fellow practitioners to advance and support this essential approach to connect and protect nature, culture, and community in the 21st century.

EXPLORE - AND ADD TO - THE DATABASE OF LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION INITIATIVES

The Network for Landscape Conservation maintains a [database of North American landscape conservation initiatives](#) on its website. The database is sortable by several basic filters (including size of initiative, location, governance structure, and age) to enable practitioners to identify - and potentially connect with - other initiatives that share similar characteristics or contexts.

If your landscape conservation initiative is not currently represented in this database and if you have not yet responded to the 2017 survey, we invite you to [complete the survey](#). Doing so will help us develop a more comprehensive database of landscape conservation initiatives and specific practices.



A setting sun silhouettes the view from the Appalachian National Scenic Trail as it passes through the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The Appalachian Trail Landscape Partnership is a joint effort by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and the National Park Service to conserve the wild, scenic, and culturally significant landscapes that surround the trail. Credit: Mark Carroll, courtesy of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy.



Public agency and private conservation organization partners from the Staying Connected Initiative visit Vermont's Little River Bridge wildlife shelf project, a cost-effective connectivity conservation project completed in 2013. Credit: Amber Collett, Vermont Natural Resources Council, courtesy of the Staying Connected Initiative.

The Network for Landscape Conservation is an open and rapidly growing community of landscape conservation organizations and practitioners. Add your voice to the community: visit our [website](http://www.networkforlandscapeconservation.org) to become an organizational partner and sign up to receive the bi-monthly news-aggregating Bulletin service.



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Advancing the Practice of Conservation at the Landscape Scale

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